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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7026
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2624
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 5747
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8602
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4533
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 3191
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 000144

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2017

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SUBJECT: CODEL LIEBERMAN'S MEETING WITH THE PML-N

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary. In a January 9 meeting with Codel Lieberman, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Chair Raja Zafrul Haq detailed alleged fraud and electoral irregularities, questioned U.S. ties with the person of President Musharraf instead of support for the people of Pakistan, and urged closer USG outreach to his party. End Summary.

12. (C) Senator Lieberman and DCM met January 9 with Raja Zafrul Haq, Chair of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party at PML-N party headquarters in Islamabad.

13. (C) Lieberman delivered two primary messages: (1) the February 18 general elections should be free and fair for Pakistan's government to maintain international credibility; and (2) the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan (and Pakistani people) is historically important, even more so now as we are allies in the fight against terrorism.

14. (C) Haq urged that U.S. officials extend their contacts with PML-N leadership. He said that Nawaz Sharif had been concerned when he read a press report that cited President Bush as saying he did not know Nawaz Sharif personally but considered the PML-N linked to the religious parties. Haq then recounted how his party had stood with the U.S. through the Cold War, including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and, more recently, the attack on Afghanistan after 9/11.

15. (C) Asked to rate the GOP's efforts against terrorism, Haq said that President Musharraf's strategy had led to polarization: "Musharraf has tried to solve everything through the use of force." He cited the Red Mosque stand-off as an unnecessary confrontation which could have been averted at any time during the four-year period of illegal activity at the site. Musharraf, he alleged, "uses terrorism for political advantage." Haq questioned why U.S. officials continued to make pro-Musharraf statements. U.S. officials should show support "for the country not the person," he urged.

16. (C) Haq said that Nawaz and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto met shortly before her December 27 assassination, and both believed that the upcoming elections would be "massively rigged" in favor of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML). He provided examples of fraud, intimidation and irregularities. These irregularities were undetectable by international observers, Haq claimed.

¶7. (C) Responding to questions on how the PML-N would fare in the elections, Haq predicted that neither the PPP nor the PML-N would win enough votes to rule alone, but he suggested that together they might have the votes to form a coalition government. He added that there was "too much bitterness for both of us" with the PML. He said that with the loss of Bhutto, Nawaz was now the only opposition leader. He claimed an increasing number of supporters "flocked to him" now.

¶8. (C) Haq noted that under previous Nawaz Sharif premierships, Pakistan's relationship with India had started to improve, and the nuclear assets had been secured. He claimed that religious conservatives had supported the secular PML-N, but that Musharraf rigged the 2002 parliamentary elections in favor of the religious parties, pushing the PML-N out of this "political space" on the political spectrum.

¶9. (U) Codel Lieberman did not clear on this message.

PATTERSON